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ABSTRACT

A federally funded research project investigated the relationship between academic learning time (ALT) and achievement of 43 educable mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, and learning-disabled students, aged 7-13, in grades 1-5. The project's final report, titled "An Analysis of the Impact of Instructional Time within Different Service Delivery Systems on the Academic Achievement of Mildly Handicapped Children," is briefly summarized in this one-page abstract. The relationship of ALT to student achievement in reading and mathematics was examined; specific strategies were suggested to increase the students' ALT; and teachers' subsequent use of the strategies was evaluated in terms of success in increasing ALT and academic achievement. Results showed, among other findings, that when direct instruction is provided, students are much more likely to be exhibiting on-task behaviors, and that direct instruction appeared to occur with the greatest frequency in resource room settings. A teacher's manual developed by the project suggests specific strategies to increase ALT and student achievement, such as increasing student attention to academic tasks, and providing more academic activities in which students experience high task success. Policy implications include options such as reallocating the time for various classroom activities and lengthening the school day or year. (JDD)

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RESEARCH & RESOURCES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

ABSTRACT I
JULY 1985

ACADEMIC LEARNING TIME AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A three-year research project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Special Education Programs, investigated the relationship between academic learning time (ALT) and achievement of mildly handicapped students [educable mentally retarded (EMR), emotionally disturbed (ED), and learning disabled (LD)]. ALT was defined to include three elements:

1. Allocated time: amount of instructional time allocated to reading and mathematics;
2. Engagement time: amount of time in which students are engaged during the allocated time; and
3. Success time: degree of student task success when engaged.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

During the first year and a half, descriptive data were collected on the amounts and kinds of ALT provided to 43 mildly handicapped students (ages 7-13, grades 1-5, predominantly learning disabled males). The relationship of ALT to student achievement in reading and mathematics was examined. During the last half of the project, the data were shared with teachers, and specific strategies were suggested to increase the students' ALT. Subsequent teacher strategies were evaluated in terms of their success in increasing academic learning time, as well as academic achievement. Selected findings include the following.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Increases in direct instruction are highly related to increased student engagement.
- When direct instruction is provided, students are much more likely to be exhibiting on-task behaviors.
- Direct instruction appeared to occur with the greatest frequency in resource room settings. Less direct instruction tended to occur in regular and self-contained classroom settings.
- Student success in reading and mathematics did not differ significantly in different classroom settings (special and regular education). The large majority of off-task behavior occurred during independent seatwork, where the majority of reading/math activities took place.
- The likelihood of student success is increased when the instructor provided some group-focused academic feedback, planned explanation, and structuring/directing of the assignment.
- Students do not succeed on a learning task if: (a) they do not try; (b) they do not understand what it is they are to do and/or how to do it; (c) they do not know if they are doing it correctly. The converse of each of these conditions appears to be necessary, though not sufficient, for task success.

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TEACHING STRATEGIES

In a teacher's manual developed by the project, specific strategies are suggested to increase academic learning time and student achievement:

1. Spend more time on academic subjects;
2. Increase student attention to academic tasks;
3. Provide more direct academic instruction; and
4. Provide more academic activities in which students experience high task success.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This research supported the findings cited in a preliminary literature review on the relationship between student achievement and amount of instructional time. Policy implications include options such as reallocating the time for various classroom activities, increasing the number of days in the school calendar, and lengthening the school day/year. A related research issue is the impact of service delivery systems selected for handicapped students, particularly those that increase non-instructional time by requiring student movement to different locations in the school building.

An Analysis of the Impact of Instructional Time Within Different Service Delivery Systems on the Academic Achievement of Mildly Handicapped Children. Final Report. 180 pp. Dept. of Education Grant No. G008001876, Project No. 443CH00168. Center for Innovation in Teaching the Handicapped, Indiana University, Bloomington. Available for $.97 (microfiche) or $14.40 (hard copy), plus postage, from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 3900 Wheeler Ave., Alexandria, VA 22304 (1-800-227-3742). Order ED No. 254 030.

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON HANDICAPPED AND GIFTED CHILDREN
RESEARCH & RESOURCES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION
THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
1920 ASSOCIATION DRIVE, RESTON, VA 22091